

# *Wrestling Perspective*

• Analysis And Commentary From The McLaughlin Group Of Professional Wrestling •

*Paul J. MacArthur and David Skolnick - Editors*

*PO BOX 401*

*Camillus, NY 13031 - 0401*

Volume I § Issue 3

April 1990

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## *To Be The Man... You've Got To Be Marketable*

The facts are painfully apparent, no one will be to the 90s what Ric Flair was to the 80s. Unfortunately, the 'Nature Boy' can't stay on top for the next ten years. Since October, there has been a great deal of pressure to remove Flair from the top post and replace him with Sting or Lex Luger. Both of these men may be able to carry the torch when Flair steps down. The question is which one should do it or should it be someone else entirely?

While we purists would prefer Flair's replacement be determined solely on the basis of ring performance, for the NWA to survive, the World Champion of the 90s needs to be marketable. Brad Armstrong and Tim Horner are two of the best workers in the sport, but few would buy them as World Champion. Without a marketable champion, the NWA will find itself in the same position it did in the late 1980s; an organization with a great champion but unable to draw. Not that it was Flair's fault, the problems were beyond his control, but to replace him with a person who won't be marketable in the nineties would be a typical NWA step backwards.

Prior to his injury, Sting was the most over face in the NWA, and judging by his reception at WrestleWar '90, the Horsemen turn and his injury may have helped push him over further. The man's potential seems unlimited as he combines a flashy aerial style with some solid wrestling, but he is not yet in the position to carry an inferior opponent. Similar to Bob Backlund, Sting works to the level of his competitor, and this could create some terrible matches when he is forced to take on lesser competition like Sid Vicious.

Sting possesses enough charisma to carry him for a while at the top and he is certainly marketable to the younger demographic the NWA is desperately trying to reach. He also has the potential to improve his ring work which would appeal to the hardcore audience as well. He is, however, by no means a team player and this could be detrimental to the organization in the long run. Not that he has reason to be, as the NWA has treated him a lot better than company men like Flair or Steamboat. But, when it is time for Sting to drop the strap, will he do it? Sting's attitude needs to be readjusted. After all, he hasn't out drawn Hulk Hogan yet. Still, he is the top babyface in the organization and will be the top draw for some time, provided his gimmick doesn't wear out. This is certainly a possibility, as a decade may be a bit to long for the public to listen to Sting scream.

Lex Luger is good, very good. His improvement over the past year has been remarkable. He has the look, the attitude and the ability to be the champion. He is extremely marketable, particularly over a long period of time. Whereas Sting is good in the ring, his selling point is his gimmick or attitude. The California beach bum who is cool and rambunctious. It's trendy, but trends can easily wear out. Luger's gimmick or attitude is less trendy as he's more a pompous monster than anything else and that's less likely to wear out over the long run. This is an important consideration if the company is looking for a long-term dominant champion.

It is this fact that makes us think that Luger may really be a better choice for the 1990s World Champion than Sting. There is less chance of Luger getting stale in the long run,

though his lack of aerial ability certainly suggests he has some obstacles. Sting's daredevil style is partially responsible for his success. That simply isn't Luger's style and could be a severe problem if there is a move away from the steroid beasts to the high fliers; something rather probable as steroid related problems begin to rise in number.

After Luger and Sting, there are a number of wrestlers who could be marketed as the World Champion of the 90s if given the right push. Scott Steiner isn't ready yet, but within two to three years, he may be in a position to take over the top spot. He has enough ability. Given a little time to learn more about ring psychology and to take some diction classes, he could be the next Flair. He is popular enough to do it, but it just isn't time yet. If Owen Hart were to sign with the NWA, and that's a big if, he could be shot up to the top fast. If he were made champion within a year, no one would be surprised. Though untested in interview skills, he has everything else in his favor. Even the WWF fans went oooh and aaah when they saw him wrestle.

While Steiner and Hart represent the young lions ready or almost ready to take over, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase and Curt Hennig are in the position to do it. They are question marks because of their commitments, or in Windham's case his inability to keep one, but they have the talent and marketability to be the World Champion.

Windham has everything going for him with the exception of a speech impediment, but that still hasn't stopped him from giving some excellent interviews. Though it's not likely he'll return in the near future, if he were to comeback, he has enough going for him that he could be marketed. Not necessarily as easy as Sting or Luger but he has so much talent that it could be done successfully, particularly if he were made to be dominant with a capital "D." Hennig's days with the WWF may be numbered and it would only be logical for him to head to an organization that could utilize his talents. Hennig's drawing power is questionable, but again, with proper tactics, it is possible he could become a convincing champion. In his case, however, he would need a successful stint as U.S. Champion before moving up to the top spot to be believable. In DiBiase's situation, he has everything going for him except his age, but he could easily dominate until 1995. If he were to come in as a face and wrestle like he did in Japan, there is little doubt he would go over big.

The problem with all this speculation is that the wrestler of 1990 is not necessarily the wrestler of the 1990s. It's not easy to speculate what the sport will be like in a few years, let alone 10. Look at who was expected to dominate the sport in 1980 and look at where they are now. With the exception of Flair, few of them are near the top. All of the names mentioned may never materialize as an unknown star may appear on the scene in a year or two and take the wrestling world by storm. But, the NWA finds itself in a bind. If they choose someone who is just a great wrestler, they fall into the 1980's trap. If they choose someone who is only marketable with no talent, they will lose their long-term following. Their choices are limited. Their situation almost demands finding a man with the ability of Ric Flair and the drawing power of Hulk Hogan. Though not quite that severe, they are in a bind.

There are several talented wrestlers ready to take over the top. Some have proven drawing power and other could draw if marketed properly. Flair could have been the biggest draw in the U.S. if the NWA had a marketing team, but they didn't. To make matters worse, they still don't. One need only look at how they promote their house shows to realize no one in the organization ever took Marketing 101. It's time for the NWA to do what a wrestling promotion is supposed to do: PROMOTE. The man of the 90s could be Sting, Luger, Windham, Steiner or Hart. They all have what it takes and they could all be marketed. But until the NWA learns how to give their wrestlers exposure, it won't matter who they put at the top because the man of the 90s will be The Ultimate Warrior. Are we ready for that?

## Sidelines

**Sophomore Slump** - Regarding Issue #2, a number of things occurred during that issue that may have made it late and subject to typographical errors. The main problem was a computer virus that destroyed our files thus Issue #2 may not have looked as sharp as we would have liked and a few errors snuck through. For that we apologize and assure you this and future issues will not have the same problems.

**Thanks To** - First off, a note of thanks to Ron Lemieux for his complimentary plug in *Arena Report*.. Also a note of thanks to J.D. McKay for his plug in *Ringside Reflector*. Thanks to Evan Ginsburg for his plug in *Wrestling Then & Now*. Mike Gunderloy of *Factsheet Five* also gets a note of thanks for his plug. We appreciate the help. A note of thanks to Ian Scott-Ellis for his last minute contributions and helping put this baby together. Finally, a note of thanks to Kevin Morrow for a few marketing ideas he gave us for our sheet.

**Writer Researching Book** on murdered Baltimore independent wrestler Jim Leon also known as Rikki Lawless would like to contact people who knew him, worked with him or saw him perform. She is also interested in obtaining copies of videotapes, pictures and programs/cards on which he appeared. If you have any information, please contact: FERK, 1498-M Reistertown RD. #243, Baltimore, MD 21208 or call (212) 459-4283.

**The Death Of The Independents** has been a major topic of discussion as of late, but few people have come up with concrete ideas on how to save them. So, we are seeking your submissions on "How To Save The Independents." We are looking for a well-written piece, minimum four paragraphs, unless you're a genius and can save the indies in less than that, and will publish the best piece we receive. The author of the published work will receive three issues added on to his/her subscription. Submitting an article on the independents signifies your tacit approval that we may publish it, unless you note otherwise. All submissions must be postmarked by May 10, 1990. Please include your phone number.

**Wrestling Then & Now** - is a new bulletin put out by Evan Ginsburg, whose articles appear monthly in *Arena Report* and has had his letters published everywhere. It concentrates on what the title suggests and is very entertaining. If you're into nostalgia this bulletin is for you. If you like more current stuff, there is plenty of that as well. To subscribe, send \$1.25 per issue or \$6.00 for six issues to: Evan Ginsburg, PO Box 471, Oakland Gardens Station, Flushing, NY 11364.

**Subscription Information** - *Wrestling Perspective* is available for \$1.00 per issue, up to \$3.00 for 3 issues and is published monthly. Please send you comments, ideas, suggestions, criticisms, letters and subscriptions to: Wrestling Perspective, PO Box 401, Camillus, NY 13031. Issues #1 and 2 are available for \$1.25 each (disregard the \$1.50 price from last issue). We reserve the right to edit all letters sent for publication.

## Video Tape Review

By - Paul J. MacArthur

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### #378-WB #127-Raw Footage NWA Pro From Houston

This is a tape collectors dream. Everyone who wants another Flair vs. Steamboat match for their collection has found the tape they've been looking for. #378-WB #127-Raw Footage NWA Pro From Houston features two cards: an NWA Landover, Maryland card

from 3/18/89 and the NWA Pro Wrestling Show with Paul Boesch from 6/88. The Landover card is a raw footage tape. This means no announcing and the camera is pretty much stationary with few closeups to bring you inside the ring. The crowd noise isn't exactly picked up well either, so you don't feel like you're inside the arena, but the action more than makes up for these technical problems. This is a good card. Lex Luger takes on Barry Windham for the U.S. Title in a solid match. The Road Warriors brawl it out with Mike Rotunda and Steve Williams and the main event of Ric Flair vs. Ricky Steamboat is another 30+ minute classic. These two put on some of the best matches ever and the Landover confrontation was no exception. This tape features top-notch action and the picture quality is pretty decent. After the Landover card it's time for NWA Pro From Houston with Paul Boesch. This is also a solid card from Boesch's UHF program that features Mike Rotunda taking on Sting and Gorgeous Jimmy Jam Garvin with Precious battles Al Perez. Things get better from there as Luger, Nikita and Dr. Death take on Flair, Windham and Arn Anderson. Then to cap it off, The Fantastics vs. The Midnight Express in a two out of three fall matchup. Good stuff. *Highly Recommended.*

#378-WB #127-Raw Footage NWA Pro From Houston is available from Brian Tramel, 1806 Self Circle Apt. #B, Jonesboro, AR 72401 for \$16.00.

## An Attempt To Derail The Midnight Express In Atlanta

By - David Skolnick

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A hardworking talented tag team is not easy to come by these days. If you can find one, put them together with a smooth-talking and creative manager, then you've got a sure winner. However, the NWA doesn't see it that way and are doing all the can to break The Midnight Express, one of the most successful and exciting combinations in the business. Although, it looks like the express and Cornette will remain together for another year, nothing is certain and their days of dominance may be over.

With the addition of Stan Lane three years ago, the Express became one of the finest working teams in wrestling. Lane's work has deteriorated somewhat since then, but they are still among the five best teams in the business.

They are prematurely ending a hot feud with Brian Pillman and Tom Zenk, while Jim Cornette has emerged as the company's best color man. So what does the NWA do? Everything in its power to break them up. Apparently, being the top heel team in the federation isn't enough. Apparently, being among the best workers is not viewed as being important by the NWA, just ask Rick Steamboat. I guess having an extraordinarily creative mind like Cornette's is not a vital factor to those in charge.

The Midnights/Rock and Roll Express feud has reportedly saved many house shows. Although nearly everyone expected it to be an uneventful rehash of 1986-87, it has been a pleasant surprise and was the best match at the last pay-per-view excluding the main event. The Pillman throat angle along with the Express stealing the U.S tag belts was the best post-WrestleWar angle to date. That is until the NWA in its infinite wisdom killed the angle.

Yet, several reports say the NWA wants to eliminate Lane and make Bobby Eaton a member of The Four Horsemen. How can anyone think this makes sense? Lane is one of the most charismatic performers they have and it would be a crime to let him go, especially now with the active roster so depleted. A move, for Eaton, like this two or three years ago would have been viewed as a promotion, but the Horsemen are a dead act now. Thankfully, it appears the NWA has canceled these plans. As for Cornette, the NWA probably doesn't want to see him go, but they have not given much of an indication that



they want him to stay. Despite the instability, all three are working harder than most anyone else in the promotion.

The NWA claims the Express has become stale and it's time to break them up. Admittedly, the act may not be quite as hot as it once was, but it is anything but tired. Without the Express, the top heel teams will be Doom, the Wild Samoans and the Freebirds. Doom and the Samoans are the antithesis of the phrase 'over'. The Birds can do a great deal, but lately Jimmy Garvin's ring work has been a lot worse than Lane's and it seems painfully obvious that the NWA cannot count on Michael Hayes.

This is the ideal time to build the Express up instead of tearing them down, but try explaining that to an organization that doesn't seem to be too concerned with improvement. There is talk that just like last year, if the NWA tries to split up the trio, they will all leave. In a business where back stabbing and looking out for number one are so prevalent, you have to admire Lane, Eaton and Cornette. They've still got several years left as a team and if the NWA can't see that then maybe the only solution to this problem is for them to leave. As Cornette says, the NWA power-that-be are so poor, they can't pay attention. Here's hoping they wake up and keep the Express together.

## Women And Wrestling: The Sex Angle

By - Rodney Leighton

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*Editors Note - Inspired by last issue's mention that we might run an article on Sex and Wrestling, Rodney 'hot rod' Leighton, whose letters and articles have appeared in Ringside Reflector and Tape Update, to name two, wrote the following commentary. We would like to thank him for his contribution and mention that your comments and contributions are always welcome and encouraged.*

Sex and wrestling. Ah, my two favourite subjects, in no particular order.

Well, you know, there are many aspects to this subject, and also many ways to write an article on it. Paul and Dave are serious minded, non cussing folks (*P&D - Only in print...*), and so, I shall put the 'hot rod' under control and prove that I, too, can be serious. Hopefully.

The first time I recall noticing any sexual aspect of wrestling was when I was when I was 18 or so. In those days, late 60's, all the lady wrestlers wore one piece bathing suits with breast restrainers. There was little jiggle and certainly no see through suits. Most still managed to convey a degree of sexiness. And, many exposed a portion of breast from time to time. As I recall, a few were teasers. Viviane Vachon would have about 40% of the guys in the crowd believing they were going to get a piece of her after the show.

Today, there are a great many different variations within wrestling. There are the women from GLOW;POWW and its successors; there are the majority of female Japanese wrestlers; a few traditional type wrestlers in North America; some non-traditional ones; valets; managers and announcers. Not to mention groupies, of both sex-starved and platonic varieties, and ring rats and who knows what.

One of the most interesting aspects is how people react to the ladies. Take the sheet writers, where we have everything from people rating the ring rats in their sheet to people who decry any hints/actions/exposure. I have taken all stances, I guess. Like Jon Gallagher and others, I decried the humiliation and abuse upon Toni Adams, but I was seriously disappointed that the network chose to obliterate the spanking scene.

Is there value in the use of sex in wrestling?

Well, the women who worked for POWW and so forth should have shown more skin than they did, because they had nothing else to offer. Perhaps the fact that they did not last too long suggests they really had nothing to offer. The ladies in Japan, the Japanese ones, stay covered for the simple fact they are mostly fantastic wrestlers. There are relatively few traditional type lady wrestlers left in North America and those few get very little work. Of the lady wrestlers who do work, many have turned to managing, and many use sex to improve their popularity. I consider Sherri Martel to be the best female wrestler in North America. In her later matches, there was lots of jiggle and some exposure. The 'hot rod' loved it, Rodney would have preferred to see a good wrestling match.

Then, we have Madusa and Misty Blue. This is what a lot of guys, and some gals, want to see. Me, I could watch Japanese ladies in action all night and care not a whit if there was anything showing or not. Run a match with say, Wendi Richter, put a Misty Blue or some such in there and you've got to have something to look at.

Managers, valets and announcers seem to go in different directions at different times. Liz was extremely popular while giving brief flashes of some cleavage and leg; she mostly used her looks. I don't totally agree with the gal who says Missy only has two reasons for having a job in wrestling, but do admit that I pay less attention to her when she keeps them covered. Most managers/valets have two functions: to distract people and to draw people. In order to do that they have to use their physical attributes. Did you ever notice that if the valet is doing lots of stuff, one or more of the people in the ring is loafing or messing up? Why do you think Sherri works so hard? Because Savage is always in with people who need carrying. And, on a lot of nights, so does he.

This is getting to long. In my opinion, each person has to look to himself. I always say, "If you got it, flaunt it." Let those of us who enjoy such things, enjoy them. Let those of you who don't, tolerate it. Do whatever you would do during a match between Paul Jones and The Junkyard Dog.

I hope this gives some pause for thought. At least.

*P&D - Rodney has brought up some good points. The use of valets and managers may be an excellent cover up for wrestlers who can't work. In which case, was there any point in having the Steiner Brothers associated with Missy Hyatt and Nancy Sullivan? Certainly their ringwork rarely needed covering. As Rodney noted there are many ways to approach this topic, and this was a good one. We appreciate the input and welcome other ideas on this subject at any time. At some point, we'll write a column with our own viewpoint as well.*

## It's As Simple As Black And White

By - Paul J. MacArthur

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Roddy Piper's recent appearance at Wrestlemania VI reconfirmed the fact that racists are running wrestling promotions. What was humorously referred to by a friend as the worst case of truckers tan in history, was, in reality, a case of a bigoted promoter continuing to spit out his racist propaganda to a largely idle-minded public.

It should have come as no surprise after Piper's half black face interviews and his subsequent singing of Mammie, but it was nonetheless. For a promotion to resort to these types of tactics is reprehensible. For a highly successful organization like the WWF to

resort to these types of tactics only shows how morally bankrupt the promotion's leaders are.

This is not a new topic by any stretch of the imagination. It has been written about elsewhere and will continue to be an issue until those in charge are replaced by people with thicker moral fiber. Until that time comes, the racism will continue. So will its effects on society.

By no means is the WWF the only offender in this issue. Jerry Lawler's recent heel turn has won him critical acclaim. Most of this praise has been directed towards his mike work. Isn't it ironic? Since when is referring to members of the audience as spearchuckers or jungle bunnies worthy of anything but disdain? No one denies Woman's managing of Doom was designed to anger those in the audience who would consider a white woman associated with two black men unacceptable. Jim Cornette's Mexican jokes and soon to come, his Indian jokes directed towards the Youngbloods, are cheap and beneath the man. Is wrestling still living in the society that existed prior to Brown vs. Board of Education? If so, do we really want to support such a society?

Piper's half-black-face interviews were unnecessary. Piper's message in the first interview was clear, but can anyone honestly tell me the majority of the wrestling public paid attention to what he said? If you doubt me on this point, remember a lot of the public thought Archie Bunker was out of his tree, but there were just as many people who misunderstood the producers message and said "Right on Archie!" Then Piper sings 'Mammie'. That merely reconfirmed the message the half-black-face was projecting. He was making fun of his opponent's race. This was not the first time Piper has mocked a black opponent's race. Recall the racial slurs he made towards Tony Atlas and Rocky Johnson when they were the WWF Tag Team Champions. So, maybe it's not only Vince who is the racist in this situation. Then Roddy comes into Wrestlemania with his body half black. What logical purpose could this serve? Does being black in America automatically make one the target for a bigot wrestling promoter's ill-conceived ideas? Why does the WWF promote this? Why are over 200 television stations airing this garbage? What can we do to stop it?

The racially offensive characterizations are numerous. Merely rehashing them won't accomplish enough. There is a deeper problem than what we see on television and in the arenas. In a society with the NAACP, EEO laws and Affirmative Action, we are watching the leaders of two of the largest wrestling organizations in the world, not to mention the leaders of the independents, create characters that will reconfirm racists beliefs and instigate fights on the schoolyard. Neither organization has shown an ounce of responsibility in this matter. If these are the type of people running these organizations, can we in good conscience allow them to stay in charge?

We live in a society where racial harmony is often dissonant. We live in a society where there are offenders on both sides of the fence. We live in a society where we allow the offenders on both sides to have free and open debate. We live in a society that, by and large, believes these people have the right to say what they do, but are simply wrong, if not ignorant, when they suggest one race is superior to another or that one race should have special preferences. We also live in a society where it is going to take time before there is the true racial harmony Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of. It will take a great deal of work to achieve King's dreams, but we are slowly making progress. Progress unjustly being thwarted by a group of promoters who have decided to appeal to fans' inner fears rather than their intellect. Progress needlessly thwarted by a group of men whose own racial bias is being shoved down the fans throat. Perhaps it is time for a King-style boycott.

## Letters To The Editors

I agreed with all of your points in the first issue, particularly the article on 'Size.' I would love to see wrestlers pushed based on ability, rather than size. My confusion lies in why we are given these steroid monsters. I'm not certain they are the preferences of anyone, smart or mark. I feel that, if marketed properly, an Owen Hart, or any of his type, could be as popular as Hulk Hogan if they were in the same promotion. It seemed as though the fans loved Owen's Blue Blazer gimmick and Vince squashed it. The Bulldogs were very popular also. I do not feel that promoters give the fans what they want, rather they try to convince them that they want what they get through the use of slick promotional tactics.

Why McMahon does this is beyond me. The only reason I can think of, is that the NWA has too many wrestlers that could better his if they competed for fans on the basis of talent. By creating a new standard on which to judge a wrestler, McMahon has avoided this conflict altogether. I doubt he will ever change this attitude, but I'd love to see the tag team situation get a push for smaller, more talented wrestlers. Why not? The tag team scene is dead in the WWF now. How about pushing the idea of speed and teamwork and make the Rockers champs, or bring in the Malenko Brothers to destroy everyone. It would be like having a light-heavyweight division again.

David McCormick  
Watertown, NY

Your commentary on juicing brought back memories of Abdullah and Sheik Farhat. The sight of those two extracting blood left me wondering how blading could be tolerated. Thankfully, today we don't see the huge/gross juice antics. I don't mind the mild blading, but let's hope it doesn't go over the top.

It is unfortunate that light heavyweights are virtually non-existent. The sight of Tiger Mask et. al. in full flight was fantastic. At the bottom of page 4 you say "some wrestlers can barely go 20 minutes without passing out." You are being kind with your estimate of 20 minutes. Personally, I think some steroid consumers are so slow and ill-conditioned, they couldn't run out of sight on a dark night.

Guy Isgro  
Australia

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